

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 8, 2021

9:02 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Roger Holland, Chair
Senator Gary Stevens, Vice Chair
Senator Shelley Hughes
Senator Peter Micciche
Senator Tom Begich

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE BILL NO. 32

"An Act establishing the Alaska middle college program for public school students; and relating to the powers of the University of Alaska."

- HEARD & HELD

SENATE BILL NO. 36

"An Act relating to reporting requirements of the Board of Regents of the University of Alaska."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 32

SHORT TITLE: COLLEGE CREDIT FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) STEVENS

01/25/21	(S)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/8/21
01/25/21	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/25/21	(S)	EDC, FIN
03/08/21	(S)	EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205

BILL: SB 36

SHORT TITLE: U OF A REGENTS REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) STEVENS

01/25/21	(S)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/8/21
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WITNESS REGISTER

TIM LAMKIN, Staff
Senator Gary Stevens
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Introduced SB32 on behalf of the sponsor.

PAUL LAYER, Ph.D., Vice President
Academics, Students and Research
University of Alaska (UA)
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Spoke about the advantages of middle college programs for UA.

DEENA BISHOP, Ph.D., Superintendent
Anchorage School District
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Described the Anchorage School District middle college program.

TIM LAMKIN, Staff
Senator Gary Stevens
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented the sectional for SB 36.

PAUL LAYER, Ph.D., Vice President
Academics, Students and Research
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Described the accreditation reporting and process for the University of Alaska.

ACTION NARRATIVE

9:02:41 AM

CHAIR ROGER HOLLAND called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 9:02 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Hughes, Begich, and Chair Holland. Senators Micciche and Stevens arrived shortly thereafter.

SB 32-COLLEGE CREDIT FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

9:03:13 AM

CHAIR HOLLAND announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 32 "An Act establishing the Alaska middle college program for public school students; and relating to the powers of the University of Alaska."

He asked Tim Lamkin to introduce the bill.

9:03:44 AM

TIM LAMKIN, Staff, Senator Gary Stevens, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, stated that SB 32 is informally referred to as the middle colleges bill. It was active last spring, but the pandemic halted its progress. He reported the data shows that middle college/dual credit programs significantly improve student success in both high school graduation rates and in entering some manner of postsecondary education. There are different models described with different vernacular. In some models students physically go to a campus. In some the college goes to the high school and then there are virtual campuses and various hybrids and combinations. The bill tries to capture the hybrid/combination model. The bill is not intended to micromanage. It says there shall be an agreement between the university and school districts that is consistent with individual district needs, interests, and capabilities. The bill wants to set up a framework and an understanding and agreement between the university and districts about what will fit.

MR. LAMKIN advised that the sponsor negotiated some changes last year in the Finance Committee so it is not one size fits all, but that it is more readily available. He noted that some districts are already successfully offering this.

9:06:13 AM

MR. LAMKIN presented the sectional:

Sec. 1: AS 14.07.168 Regarding an annual report submitted to the Legislature by the state Board of Education and Early Development, amended to include in that report a current summary of middle college activity and outcomes in the state.

Sec. 2: AS 14.30 is amended to add a new Article 15, relating to the Alaska Middle College Program.

AS 14.30.780 (a) Establishes a Middle College program for eligible students in high school to enroll in courses at the University of Alaska, and to earn credit toward a college degree as well as credit toward high school graduation.

(b) UA shall enter into an agreement with each school district to participate in the AMC, giving access to any eligible student to participate in the program.

(c) Eligibility: Establishes baseline student eligibility requirements to include being enrolled in a public school, be in high school (grades 9-12), to not have already received a high school diploma, and demonstrate to the satisfaction of both the school district and the UA as being academically competent to complete college level coursework.

(d) Awareness: Requires school districts to establish and maintain awareness of AMC course offerings and eligibility requirements to students and parents, including the academic and social responsibilities of participating in the AMC.

(e) Financing: UA and school districts shall include in their respective MOU a manner of sharing costs associated with providing the AMC program locally, including tuition waivers, scholarships, and other means of reducing program costs and finding efficiencies.

(f) Course Quality: specifies that courses offered by the AMC must meet quality and content standards, including quality instruction, and regular course and instructor review.

(g) Credit Cap: Under the AMC program, students may not enroll in more than 15 credit hours per semester, nor earn more than a total of 60 credits.

(h) ADM: Holds harmless a school district's Average Daily Membership (ADM) calculation. Students participating in the AMC program are to still be counted toward the respective school district's ADM.

(i) Transcripts: Allows the UA and school districts to exchange student transcript information for purposes of determining program eligibility or for graduation requirements.

(j) Definitions: Provides definitions for use of the term "program" in this section as being the AMC program, and for "school district" as consistent with other uses of that term in statute, as defined on AS 14.30.350.

Sec. 3:AS 14.40.040, relating to general powers and duties of the UA, is a conforming amendment to:

(c) UA must implement the AMC and regularly review the AMC course content and quality of instruction to meet national standards for dual credit, enter into MOUs with school districts consistent with the AMC, and award student credit for course completion of AMC courses, which will be fully transferable within the UA system.

9:09:43 AM

SENATOR BEGICH recalled that the committee had a long discussion about the cost of the bill when it was heard last. He referred to that in Section 2(e), financing. Part of the concern last year was the cost to districts and the potential cost to individual students so that would not become a barrier to students. Oklahoma's is free and Michigan devotes millions of dollars to this. He asked Mr. Lamkin to remind the committee of last year's discussion about how to ensure equitable access regardless of student income status and also not to adversely affect school districts.

MR. LAMKIN replied that every district will be different. There are memorandums of understanding (MOUs) out there. They are not in the committee packet because they are dated at this point. School districts are online that can go into those details.

9:11:23 AM

SENATOR MICCICHE noted that students who start in ninth grade may be capable of accumulating more than 60 credits. He described that as a limitation since students would not be limited if they paid for the coursework on their own.

MR. LAMKIN answered that there was a lot of thought about that and some interest in removing the cap, but it was based on research he conducted in prior years. As a counterbalance, it is possible, but not likely, that a student graduating from high school could have a baccalaureate for free. Whether that is desirable is a matter of policy.

9:12:39 AM

SENATOR STEVENS arrived.

SENATOR MICCICHE said he was thinking that the funding would be capped at 60 credits. That is reasonable, but the credits could go above that without a cost to the district. If a young person is capable, it seems that they should be allowed to go further. He acknowledged that it is a small subset of those who would participate in the program, but they do exist.

MR. LAMKIN responded that is a very interesting observation. Nothing precludes students from taking additional courses above and beyond, but this puts parameters on the middle college program.

9:14:02 AM

SENATOR HUGHES said she wants to hear from superintendents, but her understanding is that it is a savings to at least some of the school districts for students to take coursework through the middle college program. Paying tuition can be a net savings for school districts. In the sponsor statement, districts are required to participate and the university must set up MOUs. In the case of small districts that have no students interested, she asked how the districts could participate and if it would be a matter of simply filling out paperwork with the university and notifying parents.

MR. LAMKIN responded that the framework of the bill is not intended to micromanage. The bill says there shall be an agreement, which could be that there is no program.

SENATOR HUGHES referenced page 3, lines 25-26 that talks about national standards. She asked if those were specific to middle college and what organization puts them out.

MR. LAMKIN answered that was language that was negotiated with the university with respect to accreditation. The university wants to make sure courses it is associated with are aligned with national standards. The university will speak to that.

SENATOR HUGHES said that she looks forward to hearing from them.

CHAIR HOLLAND noted the bill says students pursue a college degree or certificate. He asked if that could be a professional or career/vocational certificate.

MR. LAMKIN replied yes. It is to provide flexibility. It is not just degree-seeking. It could be carpentry, welding, etc.

CHAIR HOLLAND called on invited testimony.

9:17:38 AM

PAUL LAYER, Ph.D., Vice President, Academics, Students and Research, University of Alaska (UA), Fairbanks, Alaska, said that dual enrollment provides great opportunity for students to earn college credit and meet high school requirements. These types of programs have been around a while. The university has many partnerships with districts now. There are many different approaches in existing programs now that have been successful that students are benefitting from. The first middle college was with Mat-Su. That has over 130 students. The Anchorage School District program has over 280 students and is increasing every year. This year the University of Alaska (UA) created a new program this year with the Fairbanks district, which was capped at 40 but has a waitlist of over 100. The university is looking at expanding that. In addition to those on-campus programs, UA has created the virtual college called Alaska Advantage with the University of Alaska Fairbanks. This provides college-level classes to students across the state. Students do not have to be at a location with a university campus. That has allowed the program to expand to over 30 districts as well as home school programs.

9:20:21 AM

DR. LAYER said that because UA is an open-enrollment system, students can take university courses if they meet the prerequisites, but these programs through the districts make it affordable for students and students get dual credit. As Mr. Lamkin mentioned, there are a lot of models. There are lots of students and districts with different situations. The university has developed models tailored to each district, whether in person, virtual, or a hybrid. The university does not want to limit itself to any particular model. Flexibility has made the programs grow. There are cohort-based programs to prepare students to become teachers and also in areas of health. The programs can focus on specific areas like engineering.

DR. LAYER said the university calls these programs dual credit, and they have been a boon to the university. Statistics show that many high school graduates who have taken advantage of Alaska middle college come to UA. That is a plus for UA. It keeps students here and engaged with the university.

9:22:57 AM

SENATOR GARY STEVENS, speaking as sponsor of SB 32, said he appreciates Dr. Layer's efforts, and noted that he made an important point. This bill is a win-win for the state of Alaska. It offers tremendous advantages to high school students, and it is very important for UA, which has had serious budget cuts. Statistically, students who start taking classes at UA in high school continue with the university to get their degrees. The legislature is for K-12 and the University of Alaska. This advantageous for the state's children and UA.

SENATOR HUGHES said this is a good thing. She was concerned to hear about the Fairbanks waitlist. She is glad to hear the university is working to expand that. Dr. Layer said students could go on campus or attend virtually. She asked if students are on a waitlist, can they go to virtual middle college or does a district need to agree to pay for that. She asked if there is a remedy for the waitlist.

DR. LAYER deferred to superintendents about agreements and how to deal with students who want to participate middle college when there is no room. The virtual college is a partnership with individual school districts, and they provide logistical support, such as mentoring, proctoring, and supervision.

9:26:19 AM

DR. LAYER clarified that regarding standards, the purpose of the program and courses is that students are taking the exact same class as university students. These are not special classes for students in high school, and they appear on academic transcripts as university classes. They meet the standards the university must have for institutional accreditation. Instructional staff are held to high standards to deliver courses, including high school staff eligible to teach that course. Students must bear responsibility when taking a course that meets university standards. Sometimes there is the idea that it is a different course for high school students. It is not. It is university level.

9:28:56 AM

DEENA BISHOP, Ph.D., Superintendent, Anchorage School District, Anchorage, Alaska, said Alaska Middle College School, AMCS, began in 2017-18 and is now in its fourth year with over 280 students. AMCS is an opportunity for students and families to use BSA (Base Student Allocation) funding model to support the costs of college and high school education simultaneously. Back in 2012 when she worked for the Mat-Su School District, the main goal for the program was to make students college ready. There was an outcry from the university about students not being college ready. Mat-Su wanted to begin a middle college program and looked at many different states where there are many different models. Mat-Su chose a place-based model, which is on campus. In the Anchorage School District (ASD), students must show a level of competency on a placement test to show they are ready to take college course. If kids are not ready yet, the ASD works with them so they can pass the entrance exams. Some get in in some areas but need tutoring to pass other entrance exams.

9:31:28 AM

DR. BISHOP said that juniors and seniors can get college credit while they complete their high school requirements. The students have the potential to earn an associate of arts degree or can work toward general education requirements. The AMCS data shows kids earn about 48 college credits before they leave. There have been students who earned over 60 credits. ASD allows them to take additional classes at school district cost. One student from East High School graduated with a bachelor's degree in science and mathematics. There are some kids like that and ASD works with them one on one. All credits are transferrable to the UA system and credits have transferred to outside colleges. The UA program is strong for those general education requirements. Seventy-two to 78 percent of students have stayed with the UA system. That is a demonstration of the quality of the university.

9:34:09 AM

DR. BISHOP said there are other dual credit programs, but AMCS has the power of place. It includes both UA and ASD staff. Students attend UAA classes with other UAA students. Some feedback from students is that they feel that the best features of AMCS are increased sense of independence and responsibility as well as flexibility with schedules. ASD teachers serve as additional support. The most challenging classes are in math. The parents shared that the best feature is the college environment. Students have the opportunity to get ahead. Around 50 percent of students in AMCS are the first-time college students [in their families]. The support assists with the

capital knowledge of how university works. ANSEP (Alaska Native Science and Engineering Program) is part of the middle college program.

9:36:31 AM

DR. BISHOP said five national merit scholars have come out of AMCS. The ASD, which is about 60 percent minority students, encourages diversity, but the middle college doesn't have the same balance as the district. It is about 50/50 white and minority students. She is proud of that. The ASD is happy to have the program and the partnership.

SENATOR MICCICHE asked if she has noticed any negative impacts with the high school activities, such as social interaction activities.

DR. BISHOP responded that students still have that high school landing. They graduate with their local high school and play sports there. There is also an AMCS graduation. Students have passes to attend high school events. The ASD tries to keep that balance in students' lives. It is usually utilized a lot in the junior year but by the senior year, many have moved on except for sports. The ASD guides the students so there are not negative consequences, such as failing college courses and not being able to graduate from high school.

9:39:59 AM

SENATOR HUGHES asked about the costs for students as compared to traditional high school. She asked if there is a gathering place on campus for those students to meet.

DR. BISHOP responded that with a legislative grant starting in 2013, the initial gathering place was the Eagle River campus with a commons area. There is special place for teachers at King Career Tech, which is adjacent to UAA. Teachers now can support teaching at King Tech. Students can gather and study together. They are in college courses. The cost is affordable. The AMCS is a school with its own funding number. The ASD utilizes the support through the BSA. The ASD is able to support those kids and pay all their fees and pay for books, which is a major expense at the university level. AMCS pays for itself. It is done well with partnerships. Speaking of partnerships, the Lower Yukon opened up its career academy in Anchorage so students can take courses at King Tech. AMCS also had its first Lower Yukon student in the program. School districts can take advantage of campus programs through partnerships.

9:43:30 AM

SENATOR HUGHES asked if she believes it would not be a drain on school district finances if the legislature were to lift the 60 credit cap.

DR. BISHOP confirmed it would not be a drain. She said not all students take 60 credits, but the district wants to support those who can take more than 60 credits.

CHAIR HOLLAND called on Dr. Randy Trani, Superintendent of the Mat-Su School District.

9:46:19 AM

At ease

CHAIR HOLLAND noted that Dr. Trani could not join because of technical difficulties.

SENATOR MICCICHE asked Dr. Trani to submit his testimony in writing.

CHAIR HOLLAND commented that he sees everyone's enthusiasm for the program.

SENATOR HUGHES said when the program first began, the Mat-Su College was hesitant to host it but it has been a positive experience. It has been wonderful for the students and families appreciate it, including a lot of families who have not previously attended college. It is a good program.

SENATOR STEVENS said he has gotten some reactions that this is a dumbing down of university classes. That is simply not the case. These are under university accreditation, and the university would not dare dumb down a class. They are often taught on a university campus or on a high school campus with a teacher with degree in that field. It is a legitimate college credit. It is a great program that works well throughout the country. The university has done a great job and Mat-Su and Anchorage have particularly done a great job as well. It is time to do it.

SENATOR MICCICHE said that some students are just ready and prepared to go beyond the high school level. He said he wants to see the program expand. He thanked Senator Stevens for bringing the bill forward.

SENATOR HUGHES asked if Alaska would be the first state to have middle college available in all districts.

SENATOR STEVENS said he does not believe so. The idea has been around a long time. He introduced the idea four years ago.

[9:51:57 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND held SB 32 in committee.

SB 36-U OF A REGENTS REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

[9:52:03 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 36 "An Act relating to reporting requirements of the Board of Regents of the University of Alaska."

He called on Senator Stevens for opening comments.

[9:52:21 AM](#)

SENATOR GARY STEVENS, speaking as sponsor of SB 36, said the bill comes from the disastrous moment in the University of Alaska (UA) history when the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) lost accreditation for its teaching program. This was unknown by everybody. The former president was not aware that the program was in jeopardy of losing its accreditation. There was a lack of communication throughout the UA system. His fear is that it could happen in other areas. Universities do not just lose accreditation. A team is sent to campus and makes recommendations months and months in advance. Months later the team comes back to see if the changes have been made to improve the program. The team makes every effort to make sure changes are made so as not to lose accreditation. That is why it was so shocking to him that in 2019 the UAA School of Education lost its accreditation.

SENATOR STEVENS said he believes the university has made changes so this will not happen again, but the legislature needs to know. The bill establishes reporting to the legislature about how accreditation is going on throughout the UA system. Specifically, he thinks there should be a joint House and Senate Education Committee meeting with the university to make sure there are no accreditation issues.

CHAIR HOLLAND called on Mr. Lamkin.

[9:54:14 AM](#)

TIM LAMKIN, Staff, Senator Gary Stevens, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, said that the first section of the bill is the result of an unintended consequence. AS 14.41.090(a)

reads that these reports be submitted to the education committees. The last time the report was due there was no Education Committee organized in the other body. To avoid that, the first section of the bill has been changed, consistent with other reporting requirements throughout the blue books, so that the report is submitted to the senate secretary/house clerk. Previous language said the report would be presented in person to the education committees, and for obvious practice reasons that has been struck from the reporting requirement.

MR. LAMKIN said the new reporting requirement that is the thrust of this bill is about the status of the university's numerous accredited programs. The committee packet has a summary of the 2019 accreditations. This morning he received an updated list from August and that is also in the committee packet. The bill is intended to align with what the university is currently doing with reporting components with particular attention to accreditation. The goal is to be preemptive and not be reactive.

9:56:22 AM

MR. LAMKIN presented the sectional analysis for SB 36:

Sec. 1: AS 14.40.190(b) Amends existing University of Alaska reporting requirements regarding teacher training and retention, to specify the report is required to be submitted to the Legislature (Senate Secretary / House Chief Clerk) biennially, by the 30th legislative day of the first regular session of each new Legislature.

Sec. 2: AS 14.40.190(c) is a new subsection establishing a requirement for the University of Alaska to issue a semiannual report on the status of all of its accreditations within the UA system. The reports must be submitted to the Legislature (Senate Secretary / House Chief Clerk):

- a. by the 30th legislative day of each regular session of the legislature; and
- b. on or by July 1st of each year.

The accreditation reports are subsequently to be presented in a formal hearing setting to the education committees of the legislature, the scheduling for which are intended to be at the discretion of the chairs of the committees.

MR. LAMKIN said that in fairness, some time has gone by since the unfortunate loss of accreditation in 2019. It is the sponsor

intent to amend the bill to change the reporting to make part of the biennial report every other year.

CHAIR HOLLAND called on Dr. Paul Layer.

9:57:16 AM

PAUL LAYER, Ph.D., Vice President, Academics, Students and Research, Fairbanks, Alaska, said SB 36 will add additional accreditation reporting by all three institutions. Accreditation is obviously the gold standard for all three universities. Each of the three universities is a separately accredited institution. Accreditation ensures students and external stakeholders that the university programs are of high quality and meet or exceed national or industry standards. There are institutional or regional accreditations. UA has accreditation through the Northwest Commission of Colleges and Universities. It is a seven-year cycle of accreditation. UAA and University of Alaska Southeast (UAS) had accreditations reconfirmed in 2017 and the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) underwent its seven-year review last fall and received a letter in February reaffirming its accreditation with commendations for the quality of its accreditation visit and report.

9:59:32 AM

DR. LAYER said institutional accreditation is an ongoing process. This year UAA and UAS revisited their mission statements as part of that process and started strategic planning. Northwest requires periodic program assessment in five-year cycles to see whether they are meeting student learning outcomes. Professional groups also have program accreditation, and the university has over 90 programs and majors that receive special accreditation. The 2019 report has a list of all the different programs across the institutions and their status. This morning he provided a report on the status of accreditation to Mr. Lamkin that the university is required to provide to the Board of Regents before its September meeting. As a result of the UAA School of Education situation, the board stepped up its expectations of reporting on the status of accreditation and any red flags. The accreditation loss of initial licensure programs at UAA in his mind was unprecedented. As far as he knows it had never happened in the history of the university, which has been accredited since 1934. He expects it to be a one-time event, and the board has taken steps to hold the universities accountable for their accreditation. In addition to the annual report, the university provides quarterly reports. The board looks at this very seriously.

10:02:43 AM

DR. LAYER said the university provides annual updates to the board. Those are public documents and are on the board's website as part of the meeting minutes. The university is happy to provide those to the legislature if those would fulfill the legislature's expectations for oversight. The university is proud of its accreditations. They factor into national rankings and recruiting.

10:03:23 AM

SENATOR MICCICHE observed that four or five programs were revoked in early child education, early childhood special education, secondary English, math, science, social studies, elementary ed, and special education. He noted that the report says that advanced preparation tracks were not affected. He asked what that means.

DR. LAYER said that in 2018 the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) reviewed half of the UAA programs, only those involved in initial licensure. That would be the bachelor's in elementary ed and secondary ed, etc. The other programs intended for secondary licensure were not affected by accreditation review. Those programs now are undergoing review by CAEP. The university is getting positive feedback from CAEP about those programs.

10:05:47 AM

SENATOR MICCICHE asked about the status of the loss of accreditation and what process leads to a return to accreditation.

DR. LAYER answered that the university is working with each of the three universities and the board to look at the prospects for bringing back those programs. The big challenge is that the State Board of Education was requiring that to get licensure in the state of Alaska, students were required to graduate from CAEP-approved programs. With the loss of that accreditation, students graduating from a nonaccredited program could not meet that standard. The university has been working with the state board to relax that requirement, especially during the emergency time of COVID. The university is looking at abilities to redevelop those programs. The university is working with UAA faculty to look at the early childhood program. UAA still has an associate degree in early childhood education. The three universities are working together to develop pathways for students in the Southcentral region to get a CAEP-accredited

degree from UAS or UAF as a method to get licensure in the state of Alaska.

[10:07:31 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS said the university has done a great job of finding these pathways. The students are not badly affected. They have been able to move forward, but as Dr. Layer said, it is unprecedented. It is important that the legislature learn what the red flags are and be part of what is going on. The regents are the most important of the process. Whoever the chair of the Education Committee is will need to have a face-to-face meeting with the regents on a biennial basis to learn about the process.

[10:08:31 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND held SB 36 in committee.

[10:08:55 AM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Holland adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting at 10:08 a.m.